



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A METHOD OF DEALING WITH UNREGISTERED DEATHS.

BY MARSHALL LANGTON PRICE, M.D., SECRETARY, STATE BOARD OF HEALTH,
BALTIMORE, MD.

1. *A method of dealing with unregistered deaths.*

Among the most annoying and perplexing of many annoying and perplexing problems with which registration officials have to deal are unregistered deaths. Like the *sine qua non* of the celebrated recipe for cooking rabbits, in order to deal with unregistered deaths, the unregistered deaths must first be found. The efficiency of registration in any registration area will largely depend upon the manner in which unregistered deaths are dealt with.

I shall mention only two methods of practical importance in discovering non-registration of deaths. The first is the census plan. At the time of taking the census full information is collected by the enumerators of the personal particulars, causes of death, etc., of decedents, and the enumerators' returns are then compared with the death records in order to identify the returns and to determine if any deaths are unregistered.

This method has many advantages, but two important objections may be mentioned. First, the information is not immediately available. It is always important to follow up these unregistered deaths at once, especially if violations of the burial permit laws are to be prosecuted. Misdemeanors in Maryland expire by limitation in one year from the time the offence is committed. Second, the evidence is generally hearsay, and applies to events of which it is often impossible to fix the date and which may have occurred more than one year previous to the time of taking the census. On this account deaths which have occurred in families in other States, and the bodies brought home for interment, are frequently credited to the State where burial occurred. Experience shows inaccuracies in the enumerators' returns in other particulars.

The second method is founded upon death notices appearing in the local papers. The latter method has been used recently by Dr. Wilbur to determine the efficiency of registration in the registration areas, and he has found so far that this information is in general more accurate and complete than that obtained by the enumerators. I have found this method such a valuable check on registration of deaths in Maryland that I expect to use it permanently in the future.

The State Board of Health of Maryland subscribes to the three principal papers of Baltimore and fifty-five town and county papers. These papers are sent to the Census Bureau, and clippings of death notices taken out and attached to the standard blank. As soon as these returns are received, they are carefully examined, and deaths outside of the State and in other jurisdictions eliminated. Those remaining are divided into three classes; viz., *possibly not registered*, *probably not registered*, and *not registered*.

A circular letter is then sent to the local registrar. Enclosed with this letter is an inquiry blank. These are filled out in duplicate and cut in two as soon as they are received by the local registrar. One part is retained by the local registrar, and the copy is sent to the proper sub-registrar in the town or county. Upon this blank are returned the name of the person, date, and place of death, and such other information as may be available. The other items of information are the cause of death, date of funeral, name and address of officiating clergyman, name and address of physician last in attendance, name of coroner, name of sub-registrar, name and address of officiating undertaker, place of burial. The last two questions asked are: Reason why permit was not issued, and reason why death certificate was not received?

Excuses like the following were generally for failure to answer these questions: "Sub-registrar away"; "sub-registrar sick"; "no sub-registrar." All of the cases, where necessary evidence was obtained, were prosecuted without regard to extenuating circumstances. Complete evidence can nearly always be obtained in this class of cases by diligent inquiry, and all of the cases brought to trial in this State resulted in conviction.

In many cases the data returned by the local registrar were not of the slightest value as evidence, and in many others were not returned at all. Those cases which fell in the *not registered* class were investigated by the Medical Officer of the Board (Dr. Rohrer).

The method of dealing with unregistered deaths may thus be summarized as follows:—

1. Original information from death notices in local papers.
2. Special information from investigation.
3. Prosecution.

I think I can safely say that on account of this system few illegal interments occur in Maryland without my knowledge, and that this number will be eventually cut down to a negligible figure.